

Scope and Usage of Discourse Analysis as a Research Method in English Studies

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Abstract: *It is necessary to follow proper research methods while analyzing any literary text to get the intended result. There are many research methods in English studies and discourse analysis is one of them. Discourse analysis can be used as a research method to show how images construct specific views of the world. The discourse analysis at the same time references a principle of language, and technique for examining written and oral language as it is used. Discourse analysis, particularly the thing branded as critical discourse analysis, is centrally concerned with examining arrays in language use in demand to discover the functioning of ideology or speculation in it, and therefore able to repel it.*

Key Words: *Discourse analysis, Critical discourse analysis, Language, Ideology, Power.*

1. Introduction:

A proper research method is one of the most essential parts of any research undertaking. The outcome and the success of the research are determined by the research method that the scholar employs. There are many types of research methods that the student of English studies can use according to his needs and objectives of the research such as Archival Methods, Auto/biography as a research method, Textual analysis as a research method, Visual Methodologies, etc. Discourse analysis is one such research method.

Discourse analysis, also called discourse studies, was developed during the 1970s as an academic field. Discourse analysis examines language use in both written and oral forms. Its primary assumption is that the language is invested. It means that a language is

...not a neutral tool for transmitting a message but rather, all ‘communicative events’ – whether these be, for instance, reading of novels, plays, poetry, a notice on a billboard, a conversation, or an interview – constitute a particular way of talking about and understanding the world both on the part of the producer and on the part of the consumer. (Griffin 91)

So Discourse analysis means two things a theory of language use and a method to analyze the language in use.

Discourse analysis as a research method studies written or spoken language in association with its social background. It wishes to recognize how language is used in actual life conditions. There are two modules in Discourse analysis. First one is about the exploration of the pattern of language that is used, as Griffin says that the use of subjective pronoun can mark the authority status of speaker/narrator, for instance, the use of ‘I’ by the storyteller to give his judgment about whatsoever gives him more authority for it. The second part is of the form of language use as action or development, for example, the extent of verbal space a speaker has in an exchange. While other measures of language study might put importance on particular parts of language such as words and phrases or the pieces that make up words, discourse analysis looks at a running conversation comprising a speaker and a listener. The purpose of discourse analysis,

...is to produce an analysis or ‘explanatory critique’ of how and to what purpose language use is invested through the deployment of specific textual features, in order to facilitate understanding of its effect and the possibility of resistance to that investment. (Griffin 91)

When doing Discourse analysis a researcher should concentrate on the purpose and effects of dissimilar kinds of language, cultural influences, and conventions in communication, how ideals, opinions and norms are being communicated and how language use relays its political, historical or social framework. Discourse analysis is a shared qualitative research method in various humanities and social science fields, containing anthropology, cultural studies, linguistics, sociology and psychology.

2. What is Discourse analysis?

The English word discourse originates from the Latin word *discursus* which means running to and fro. According to the google dictionary the word discourse means ‘written or spoken communication or debate’ or to ‘speak or write authoritatively about a topic’. So there are several types of discourses and they have their own set of meanings and

vocabularies related to the subject of communication such as medical discourse, scientific discourse or legal discourse, etc. Griffin says that;

Discourse may also refer to a specific set of statements within a given context, a regulated practice which accounts for a number of statements such as religious discourse or sermons, for example, or fairy tales, which have definable characteristics and features established and maintained through the regulations that govern what you can and cannot utter as part of these genres or sub-genres, and how you can articulate it. (Griffin 92)

He gives the example of the conventional beginning of a fairy tale that is ‘once upon a time...’ and not ‘Beloved in Christ....’ which makes it different from a sermon. So Discourse allows some expressions while preventing others. According to Snape and Spencer, discourse analysis emerged from the discipline of sociology and is about: "Examining the way knowledge is produced within different discourses and the performances, linguistic styles and rhetorical devices used in particular accounts." (200)

If a writer were to combine two different types of discourses with different kinds of truth claim then that will create what Griffin calls inter-discursivity. Discourses generate a diverse type of truth claims or effect. Fairy tales and Sermons are completely different as the first one is a kind of fictional story that is not literary true so it begins with the opening statement ‘Once upon a time....’ but it also contains a moral message, while sermons are partly literal truth and also contains the moral message. So if we were to start a sermon with ‘once upon a time....’ then that “would undercut the literal truth element of the sermon and render questionable the truth effect a sermon is meant to produce.”(Griffin 92). That would not be an appropriate discourse in a social context. In discourse analysis, the cultural and social context of a conversation is taken into account as well as what's being said. This context may include the position of a speaker at the time of the discourse, as well as nonverbal signs for instance body language, and, in the case of written communication, it can also contain metaphors and codes. As Teun A. van Dijk says, "[It's] the study of real language use, by real speakers in real situations," (60).

Similarly, language does not have a permanent, detached meaning, but is colored by a whole collection of situational influences: the author's conviction, the immediate economic, social and political context, any proficient community to which the person belongs – which will have its private mumbo jumbo – as well as the direct state of affairs in which the words were expressed. In an editorial from the *Journal of Organizational Change Management* which observed the impact of discourse analysis to an understanding of organizational change, Fairclough and Wodak say, “Discourse is not produced without context and cannot be understood without taking context into consideration... Discourses are always connected to other discourses which were produced earlier, as well as those which are produced synchronically and subsequently.”(277) Griffin gives an example of a character Carel’s speech from Iris Murdoch’s *The Time of the Angels* to explain this. The novel here signifies the normative business of discourses, giving that discursive outlines define the limits inside which we can negotiate meaning.

Griffin says that meaning and importance in the discourse is also subject to change, he calls it the order of discourse. As time passes the traditional values are always being challenged by the new ideas in the language so “hegemony or pre-eminence of a given discourse is not set in stone but achieved through struggle and therefore subject to change.”(Griffin 93) like the struggle between the old and new scientific discourse. He gives an example of the feminist reading of certain literary forms like fairy tales, as analysis of the power struggle between the wolf and the Little Red Riding Hood will give the reader a new perception about the truth that is being claimed. So;

...the fact that it can be the object of change through being used in different ways from what is ‘normally’ the case. Effective contestations of specific discourses result in socio-cultural changes, and discourse analysts are partly concerned with how such changes can be brought about. (Griffin 93)

This shows that texts such as novels are subject to change in terms of an analytical perspective, they also talk about differential access to power and speech that diverse groups in society have. According to Phillip and Jorgensen, an analyst include these things while doing discourse analysis, first is “an analysis of the discourses and genres articulated in the production and consumption of the text” (Griffin 94) analyzing the discursive features of the text’s genre as we saw before the difference between the opening of fairy tales and sermons. Second is “an analysis of the linguistic structure” (Griffin 94). And the third one is “consideration about whether the discursive practice reproduces or, instead, restructures the existing order of discourse and about what consequences this has for the broader socio-cultural practice.” (Griffin 94) For instance examining fairy tales from the feminist perspective.

3. Types of Discourse Analysis:

Since its emergence in the 1970s, discourse analysis has been evolving and now it’s being used in most of the humanities and social-science studies like literature, psychology, sociology, etc. Griffin talks about six discourse analytical research practices,

- Conversation analysis and ethnomethodology.
- Interactional sociolinguistics and the ethnography of communication.
- Discursive psychology.
- Critical discourse analysis and critical linguistics.
- Bakhtinian research.
- Foucauldian research.

These practices have few similar aspects, main is that they focus on the language used in their research; they have a common assumption that the language “is not a neutral means for conveying a message but rather shapes our perceptions of the world” (Griffin 95). And this happens because of the power that the language holds over masses in the hierarchical structure. The power can also be challenged by changing the language use, so this births the possibility of having change or resistance to a dominant discourse by placing it in a particular time and context.

Griffin also talks about the differences between these practices. They are different in degree to which they looked at the world as partially or fully created through discourse. They focus on different types of discourse like written discourse or spoken discourse. There is also a difference in context in which they analyze the discourse and the knowledge that they wish to unveil. So this indicates that the discourse analysis is not a unitary research method but “one that takes different forms in a different context, dependent upon the research one wishes to conduct, and within what academic discipline.” (Griffin 95)

4. Critical Discourse Analysis:

Griffin talks about the Fairclough’s version of critical discourse analysis which differentiates between discursive aspects of the communication from non-discursive, and mainly focuses on how discourses produce and change the world. It shows how the texts by the people in authority like the government can recreate a different version of the world. So Fairclough’s critical discourse analysis is “concerned with the relationship between language, the subject, and social processes, viewing the subject as capable of influencing perceptions of the world, and thus of changing things, through his or her use of language.” (Griffin 96). Observing Fairclough and Wodak, Phillips and Jorgensen, Griffin finds six common elements in the different practices of critical discourse analysis:

First is the understanding that language and discursive practices contribute to the constitution of the world. Second, the notion that discourse is both constituted by and constitutes the sociocultural world. Third, the focus on actual language use within a given context as the object of research. Forth, the notion that discourse is invested, and contributes to the (re)production of power relations in society and the interpretive schema operating within a given society. Fifth, the notion that discourse is historically situated, hence contingent and subject to change. Sixth, the demand that discourse analysis should be concerned with a critical examination of language to promote change.

So language does both the things together that it talks about ‘the world’ as well as create a new meaning to it as well. Griffin gives the example of Jane Austen’s *Pride and Prejudice* to explain this. In the opening sentence of the novel, Jane Austen says that “It is a truth universally acknowledged, that a single man in possession of a good fortune, must be in want of a wife”. So by making this kind of statement at the beginning of her novel she is allowing certain kinds of views while blocking others. It creates Austen’s view of ‘single man’ and the only way of looking at him. But the purpose of discourse analysis is not merely describing the text’s linguistic feature but it is to showcase how certain kinds of statements set up and replicate certain world view.

Critical discourse analysis integrates an inner study of language with the outward study of its context – how social practices and relations affect the text. The term intertextuality is frequently used – which means the requisite for one text to be read in the light of its references to and variances from the structure or content of other texts. Critical discourse analysis can also be used to expose power relationships, and how certain groups can be marginalized. As Mills says, for instance, “discusses sexist and racist discourses as a way of laying bare the operations of language use in the articulation of particular value systems.” (Griffin 99)

5. Range of Analysis:

Discourse analysis can be carried out on some part of a text or whole body of the text. It is very difficult to do the full discourse analysis as it is beyond the scope of just a single research project to tackle all the textual features. A researcher “therefore of necessity has to be selective, concentrating on certain textual features at the expense of others.” (Griffin 101), while doing research. So all the researches are not complete but partly done according to the researcher’s objective. The researcher must decide on what to include and what to exclude. So it is suggested that a researcher should make a clear description of how they conducted the research and what choices they made. And that depends on the Researcher’s ability to understand the reactions of his actions is important here. “Explicitness, transparency and

reflexivity are the keywords here, even as the issue of researchers themselves being formed by the discourses they examine and the question of how they can step outside these to reflect on their own practices remains.”(Griffin 101)

6. Tools of Discourse analysis:

The researcher should use the tool that is best suitable for their need and objective while doing discourse analysis. So when analyzing, a play, or conversations in novels, a researcher should use the tools of conversation analysis to know how turn-taking in making conversation is organized in the plays or novels that are being analyzed. In discourse analysis, such analysis goes beyond just saying who speaks and when, to an analysis of the meaning of that turn-taking, as what it discloses in terms of the relative power a given speaker has to occupy in the conversation.

Such an analysis could then be further enhanced by discussing the function each speaker adopts when they take their turn to speak, for instance in initiating or blocking a topic, supporting or dissenting from the previous speaker’s viewpoint. Such analyses can reveal much about the social structures (re)produced in a text. (Griffin 102)

Moreover it can also be used to understand the differences of dialogue between two diverse forms of literature. While doing such analysis the researcher also has to use knowledge from the outside of the text, need to know the culture he is dealing with and he can use other texts for the understanding.

Researchers can decide what textual features to pay attention to while doing discourse analysis. That is determined by his aim. A feminist looking will motivate the researcher to pay more attention to how gender is being treated in the text. The words that are used to describe the characters and their situation. The balance of power between males and females in the text and the language used by the author to show that power dynamic. A postcolonial analysis can motivate the researcher to look at the ideas of racism in the text. “Such constructions, though possibly posing as ‘merely descriptive’, are never simply just that but also express power relations in a given culture by attaching different values to different positions within the discourses in question.” (Griffin 103) Different theorists of discourse analysis have viewed the relation between power and discourse differently but they all agree that “power, and of course powerlessness, are expressed and maintained, but also challenged, through discourse.” (Griffin 103)

Discourse analysis is then in part about laying bare the operations of power, of how knowledge and truth are (re)produced by and in certain discourses, and about the effects these have. (Griffin 104)

7. Discourse Analysis of Joseph Conrad’s *Heart of Darkness*:

I will attempt to analyze a few passages from Joseph Conrad’s *Heart of Darkness* based on my understanding of the discourse analysis. I will look at the text from the colonial perspective to understand colonial discourse in it and for that I will examine the author’s use of language to show his ideas about colonialism and prevailing thoughts of his time.

To justify their rule over African and Asian nations, European classified them as uncivilized nations and it was their duty to civilize them. They used hierarchy within the human species to categorize the non-European or non-white to establish the notions of the other. This was a prevailing idea during Conrad’s time and this got reflected in European writing of that time as well such as Rudyard Kipling talked about white men’s burden in his poem. Colonial discourse focused on the representation of the other through the writer’s narrative style. These stereotypes, otherness, ambivalence and binary oppositions are major colonial discourses in post-colonial literature.

Joseph Conrad’s *Heart of Darkness* showed the impact of stereotyping as a colonial discourse, through the character of Marlow. Marlow starts to recount his childhood dream to visit the blank spaces in Asia and Africa. As a boy Marlow was influenced by the image or the representation of Africa as the Dark Continent, Australia as an empty place and Eldorado South America.

Now when I was a little chap I had a passion for maps. I would look for hours at South America, or Africa, or Australia, and lose myself in all the glories of exploration. At that time there were many blank spaces on the earth. (Conrad 12)

In *Heart of Darkness* Marlow resembles his journey to the Congo River to the earliest beginning of the world “Going up that river was like traveling back to the earliest beginnings of the world” (Conrad 54)

Another colonial stereotype in *Heart of Darkness* is the image of the Africans; they were reported as black, savage and barbaric thus the European superiority. In *Heart of Darkness*, Conrad questioned the humanity of the

Africans through the character of Marlow, since they had a different physical appearance; he also doubted whether they were a real human being or not:

We are accustomed to look upon the shackled form of a conquered monster, but there you could look at a thing monstrous and free. It was unearthly, and the men were no, they were not inhuman. Well, you know, that was the worst of it this suspicion of their not being inhuman. It would come slowly to one. (Conrad 72)

This way we can see that the language and dialogues in Joseph Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* show the outlook of Europeans towards African culture in his time. Use of words like "monstrous" and "unearthly" displays that they were not even considered as human beings which shows how the power in society influences the language.

8. Conclusion:

Discourse analysis is a suitable research method for examining socio-political outlooks manifest in texts. The gaining of the applicable skills needs time and effort from the scholar and nurtures the query of the effectiveness of such acquirement in a research method that is developing practically and theoretically, and agreed that one may work with this research method for only a restricted period. Discourse analysis improves equally a researcher's research aptitude and generates manner and content-specific information that is beneficial across numerous diverse types of activity. It can likewise decide the scholar's research field and future.

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